

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASUNCI 01614 230133Z

72

ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2427

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

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TAGS: PFOR, SOCI, PA

SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER SPONSORS PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF INDIAN
SITUATION

REF: ASUNCION 1257

1. ON APRIL 18 MINISTER OF DEFENSE GENERAL (RET)
MARCIAL SAMANIEGO SPONSORED A ROUND TABLE
DISCUSSION ON THE PRESENT SITUATION OF PARAGUAY'S
INDIGENOUS POPULATION. THE PURPOSE OF THE DIS-
CUSSION, SAID SAMANIEGO, WAS TO "...LEARN ABOUT THE
SITUATION OF THE INDIANS, KNOW THEIR PROBLEMS AND
RECOMMEND SOLUTIONS." THE DISCUSSION WAS HELD UNDER THE
AUSPICES OF THE GOP'S DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
(DEPARTAMENTO DE ASUNTOS INDIGENES) ESTABLISHED IN
THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE BY GEN. SAMANIEGO IN THE
1950'S. PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED SUCH LEADING AUTHORITIES
ON PARAGUAY'S INDIANS AS GENERAL (RET) RAMON
CESAR BEJARANO, PRESIDENT OF THE PARAGUAYAN
INDIGENIST ASSOCIATION, AND JESUIT PRIEST BARTOLOME MELIA,
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PAGE 02 ASUNCI 01614 230133Z

PRESIDENT OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY'S CENTER FOR ANTHRO-

POLOGICAL STUDIES. THE LATTER HAS BEEN A FREQUENT AND VOCIFEROUS CRITIC OF THE GOP'S INDIAN POLICY.

2. THE MINISTER CALLED UPON THOSE PRESENT--CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES, LOCAL AND FOREIGN ANTHROPOLOGISTS, AND VARIOUS GOP OFFICIALS--TO SPEAK FRANKLY ABOUT THE PROBLEMS FACING INDIANS IN PARAGUAY. IN THE THREE HOURS OF DISCOURSE WHICH FOLLOWED, THE PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBED THEIR OWN ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF INDIANS AND THE PROBLEMS THEY HAD ENCOUNTERED. THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED PROBLEM WAS THAT OF SECURING AND PROTECTING LAND FOR INDIAN USE.

3. IN THANKING THE PARTICIPANTS, SAMANIEGO NOTED THAT THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR RECENTLY HAD INFORMED HIM PERSONALLY THAT PARAGUAY HAD BEEN ACCUSED IN THE U.S. OF COMMITTING GENOCIDE AGAINST ITS INDIAN POPULATION AND THAT, IN RESPONSE TO THAT ACCUSATION, US CONGRESSIONAL ACTION MIGHT BE PROPOSED. THE MINISTER POINTED OUT THAT THIS CHARGE, THOUGH UNFOUNDED, REFLECTS ADVERSELY ON ALL THOSE WORKING TO PROTECT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PARAGUAY'S INDIANS. HE URGED THE PARTICIPANTS TO ASSIST HIM IN COUNTERING DISTORTIONS WHICH HAVE APPEARED IN THE WORLD PRESS.

4. COMMENT: THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION, WHICH WAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE IN THE LOCAL PRESS, INDICATES INCREASING GOP AWARENESS OF THE UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY OF THE PLIGHT OF PARAGUAY'S INDIAN POPULATION. OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE ACTIVITY IN BEHALF OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION HAS INCREASED DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS; THE PARAGUAYAN INDIGENIST ASSOCIATION HAS BEEN CONDUCTING A SERIES OF SEMINARS, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY'S CENTER FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES HELD A NEWS CONFERENCE ON APRIL 22 TO ANNOUNCE A MAJOR PROJECT TO PROTECT INDIAN RIGHTS, AND THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL WELFARE SET ASIDE 5,200 ADDITIONAL HECTARES OF LAND FOR EXCLUSIVE INDIAN USE.
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